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UNCLAS KIRKUK 000300

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR NEA/I, EAP/CM, INR/NESA, INR/EAP

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [ETRD](#) [CH](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: (U) CHINA WOOS IRAQI KURDS

(U) SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED; PROTECT ACCORDINGLY. NOT FOR INTERNET DISTRIBUTION.

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: China seeks better relations and trade with Iraq's Kurdistan Region, including oil. Kurdistan is officially autonomous, but foreign relations remain the prerogative of the Iraqi national government, so the Kurds' dealings with China are handled through the dominant political parties. The main oil field in northern Iraq lies in Kirkuk province, which the Kurds seek to incorporate into Kurdistan but is currently outside the autonomous Kurdistan Region. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) Kosrat Rasul Ali, a senior official of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), briefed Regional Coordinator December 21 on his October trip to China at the head a PUK delegation. He explained that the visit was at the invitation of the Communist Party of China (CPC; a CPC delegation visited Iraq's Kurdistan Region last May). Kosrat said the Chinese wanted two things: to mend fences with Iraq and the Kurds after having been staunch supporters of Saddam Hussein, and trade. Kosrat claimed he had told his hosts the United States is the liberator of Iraq and protector of democracy, and that he had urged them not to support dictatorships (Syria and Iran). He said his hosts heard the message but did not necessarily like it.

3. (SBU) Another senior PUK official, Noshirwan Mustafa, confirmed to Regional Coordinator that the Chinese were trying to "clean their face" after their close ties to Saddam. He said they specifically wanted "oil, telephone (i.e., a contract for a telephone network) and trade."

4. (SBU) COMMENT: The PUK, which runs Sulaymaniyah, and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which runs Erbil and Dahuk, are actively promoting trade and investment, with some success: Kurdistan is significantly more secure than most of Iraq, and between them, the PUK and KDP have been firmly in control of the Kurdistan Region since the early 1990s, thanks to the protection of the US-UK northern no-fly zone. The autonomy of the Kurdistan Region is enshrined in both the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL, the temporary constitution which has been in force throughout Iraq until now) and the permanent constitution adopted by referendum in October. However, foreign relations remain the prerogative of Iraq's national government, therefore the Kurds' dealings with China are handled in party channels rather than governmental channels.

5. (SBU) COMMENT CONTINUED: Most intriguing is Noshirwan Mustafa's reference to oil. The main oil field in northern Iraq is in Kirkuk province, which the Kurds openly seek to incorporate into Kurdistan but is currently outside the autonomous Kurdistan Region.

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